

**A Feminist and Postmodernist Dialogue
with Chicano Males and Mexico
or
Deconstructing the Prison House of
Sexist Language and Structures
Interview with Erlinda Gonzales-Berry**

Introduction

The novel *Paletitas de guayaba* (1991) by Erlinda Gonzales-Berry represents—as held by the interviewers—a pivotal contribution to Southwest Mexican narrative on two levels: 1) the first major literary dialogue with Mexican society and letters and 2) an excelling postmodernist text. Using various innovative narrative techniques to bracket traditional novelistic elements, such as time, space, character, language, the text questions the narrative act itself, marking in key instances the message as a call for the feminization of a still predominantly masculinized *Aztlán* and *México*.

Keeping in mind research on the Chicano novel by Juan Bruce-Novoa, Salvador Rodríguez del Pino, Vernon E. Lattin and Manuel de Jesús Hernández-G. as well as significant writings in Chicana feminist theory and literary criticism by Norma Alarcón, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa and Angie Chabram-Demersesian, the interviewers designed questions that elicit fundamental answers (biography, education, ideology) from Gonzales-Berry to establish a place for *Paletitas* in the narrative canon. They believe this text's contribution to the Southwest Mexican novel semantically empties the signifiers in the statement, "I dabble in creative writing," by Gonzales-Berry; rather, in *Paletitas* language betrayed her and "said a whole lot of things [the author] wasn't particularly bent on saying."

In the Southwest Mexican narrative, Erlinda Gonzales-Berry made her first

contribution as a critic. The articles, “*Caras viejas y vino nuevo: Journey Through a Disintegrating Barrio*” (1979) and “*Estampas del valle: From Costumbrismo to Self-Reflecting Literature*” (1980), were both included in the important critical anthology *Contemporary Chicano Fiction: A Critical Survey* (1986) edited by Vernon E. Lattin. She (with Tey Diana Rebolledo) is also known for one of the first important essays on *The House on Mango Street*, “Growing Up Chicano: Tomás Rivera and Sandra Cisneros” (1985). Editing the exhaustive study *Pasó por Aquí: Critical Essays on the New Mexican Literary Tradition, 1542-1988* (1989) represents her major critical contribution, one that will serve as a necessary reference text for decades. Gonzales-Berry has also made a notable contribution to the study of writings by Nuevo Mexicanas in two anthologies: 1) *Las Mujeres Hablan: An Anthology of Nuevo Mexicana Writers* (1988), where she served as coeditor with Tey Diana Rebolledo and Teresa Márquez, and 2) *Nuestras Mujeres: Hispanas of New Mexico—Their Images and Their Lives, 1582-1992* (1992), where she served as associate editor under Tey Diana Rebolledo. She has also recently published a brief memoir of her secondary education at a boarding school, the El Rito Normal School, for Spanish American youths in New Mexico, “A Normal Education: The Spanish-American School at El Rito,” *La Herencia del Norte* 3 (1994):20-21.

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A. BIOGRAPHY AND WRITING

1. Where were you born? What is your native language?

I was born in Roy, New Mexico in 1942. My parents taught us (four sisters and myself) both Spanish and English in childhood. However, Spanish was the language most frequently spoken in the family and in our community.

2. When did you start to write short stories and novels?

During the early 70s, I was inspired by emerging Chicano writers and experimented a bit with creative writing. The only thing I ever published from those days was a short poem in *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*. I am happy to say that nothing else has survived. I didn't write again until the 80s when I wrote *Paletitas de guayaba* (Guava popsicles; 1991).

3. Why do you write? Do you seek to give a narrative voice in Spanish to Chicanas? Who is your primary audience?

I can't really say “I write.” It is more accurate to say, “I have written.” And I have

written very little: 1) *Paletitas de guayaba*, 2) some short vignettes which appeared in *Las Mujeres Hablan* (Women speak; 1989). When I wrote those items, I wrote them because I believed I had something to say that might be of interest to others. That's the packaged answer. Closer to the truth, or a truth, may be that I needed to exorcise a rage that was consuming me and I couldn't afford psychoanalysis. That applies to *Paletitas de guayaba*. The "Rosebud" excerpts were motivated by something else. Initially, that was more an exercise than anything else. I am not certain why I wrote *Paletitas de guayaba* in Spanish. One answer could be that having been trained in Latin American Literature Spanish is the language in which I have read more literature. In another place—an MLA conference, I believe—I stated that writing in Spanish allowed me to create a persona which distanced me personally from the act of writing. I also said that I somehow felt more secure writing in Spanish than in English. Perhaps I felt that readers in Spanish would be less judgmental than English language readers. But there is something else; the fact that I grew up listening to stories in Spanish. I remembered the voices of my grandmothers, great aunts and great uncles, aunts and uncles, my father and my mother, and I wanted to imitate them. I think my writing has a certain oral quality to it that I attribute to having been brought up on oral lore, *La Llorona*, *brujas* and *bultos*, *apariciones del diablo*, *la muerte*, *los días de antes* [Hollering Woman, witches and bodies, appearances of the Devil, Death, in days past], all that great stuff. Also, there is something about freedom. I feel that Spanish gives me more latitude to experiment. I find that English constrains me more. I feel very self-conscious expressing myself creatively in English. As I said elsewhere, perhaps I feel that way because as a child, I always felt loved in Spanish. In English, I felt judged—and of course, I also felt that I never measured up to standards.

I intended my primary audience to be anyone who reads Spanish. However, I believe I had special things to say to both Chicanas(os) and Mexicans.

4. Why did you chose to write in Spanish? Why do you think most Chicana narrators write in English?

I think one writes in the language(es) one handles best. Most Chicanas writing narrative today probably write best in English. There are exceptions, of course, such as Margarita Cota-Cárdenas and Lucha Corpi. Lucha writes beautifully in Spanish, yet her novels are written in English. I don't know why, but perhaps the market has something to do with her choice. The problem with writing in Spanish is that there is not a very broad reading audience for those works. *Paletitas de guayaba*, for example, has gone virtually unnoticed. But then, maybe it's not a linguistic issue. I assume that my writing makes some—maybe a lot—of people uncomfortable, so they pretend they didn't notice it.

5. What role does bilingualism have in your life and your writing project? Your prose writing has been published in both English and Spanish. Is there a

different objective that you want to achieve or create when you write in one or the other languages?

Bilingualism is a way of life for me. I teach daily in Spanish. My academic writing is in Spanish and English. I code-switch with facility when with Chicana and Chicano friends and family. It is important to me in my writing project because it allows me to capture in writing what I do, and what I see others around me doing—speaking more than one language.

When I chose English for the *Rosebud* series, I was very consciously trying to capture Sandra Cisneros's style of writing. She writes in English. I, of course, failed, but I think I began to see that I am capable of giving life to voices that speak English.

6. One of the defining texts of contemporary Chicano literature is *El espejo/The Mirror*, 5th printing, from 1972. Are you familiar with its existence? Did it have any impact on your call to write?

I indeed know *El espejo*. I think almost everything I read written by a Chicana or Chicano in the sixties and early seventies had an impact on me. It made me want to write—want to join that large family that was finally appearing on the written page—and to tell the world about us, *la raza*. I had to wait a long, long time before I was actually ready to write for public consumption.

7. What does the word *feminist* mean to you? Do you consider yourself a feminist? A feminist writer? Has the Chicana writer moved beyond depending on a space or refuge in Anglo-American feminism in order to now be able to express herself and maintain her very own feminist discourse in Chicano literature?

Yes, I am a feminist, and yes, I consider myself a feminist writer. *Feminism* is, for me, a state of consciousness which makes one aware of how structures of domination affect the lives not only of women but of all colonized peoples.

But that is not enough; it is also a state of consciousness that makes one openly oppose and combat practices, discourses, codes, language, etc. that treat/mark women and people of color as inferior, or less than. While I certainly owe a great deal to Anglo feminism, I cannot cease to be Chicana. That I am Chicana means that my feminism will of necessity be affected by that fact. What is most important to me is to feel free to write whatever it is I want and need to write. All of that will come from my experience as a Chicana—a woman reared within a very specific family and marginalized cultural milieu. I would hope that my feminism coincides with that of other Chicanas.

8. The book *Chicano Authors: Inquiry by Interview* (1980) by Juan Bruce-Novoa established Estela Portillo-Trambley as the standard bearer of Chicana

narrative. She has one matrix feminist text, *Rain of Scorpions* (1975), and a novel, *Trini* (1986), which features a female protagonist. How does your writing differ from hers as far as themes and characters?

It's been a long time since I read *Rain of Scorpions*. I remember liking some of her narrative pieces, but I don't remember to what extent I related to them. As far as *Trini* is concerned, I guess my own writing is very different. I would say Portillo is more committed to telling a story. I, on the other hand, am more interested in playing and experimenting with language, and in being irreverent.

9. To which literary tradition do you adhere? Chicano narrative? Chicana narrative? Mexican narrative? Contemporary American narrative?

I certainly place myself within the tradition of Chicana narrative, and also Chicano narrative. I feel a special kinship with Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, with Ana Castillo. I don't see my work fitting within the canon of Mexican literature. American literature, yes. Ours—*manitos'* [New Mexican]—is very much an American experience. When I write from that position, what else could I write if not American literature.

10. What place do you seek in New Mexican narrative? In Southwestern Chicano narrative?

Again, I am a manita. I speak from that position, therefore I seek a place in New Mexican narrative, in a very different way, though, from someone like Anaya, or Ulibarrí—at least in *Paletitas de guayaba*. In the *Rosebud* excerpts, I suppose I am very much in their tradition—nostalgically recalling the past. Inscribing memory, I believe, is one way to preserve culture; it is also a way to create community. Southwestern Chicano narrative? Of course, my work is part of that too.

11. According to Francisco Lomelí, the rise of Chicano narrative in the 1970s coincided with an intense interest in experimentation. At the level of narrative technique, *Paletitas de guayaba* falls into post-modernist fiction. Did you consciously participate in such an interest? Do you believe postmodernism is the path for the near future?

I indeed see my work as fitting on some levels within the rubric of postmodernism. On the other hand, construction of subjectivity and identity is so central to *Paletitas de guayaba* that I am not sure postmodernism can accommodate my work. I think ultimately one's work fits among the other texts that one has read or otherwise absorbed. I live in a postmodern age, I read postmodern texts. What else can I say?

12. Of all the narrative texts from Chicano literature, both male and female,

***Paletitas de guayaba* is the only direct dialogue with Mexico, its youth and intellectuals. What led you to engage in such a matrix discourse?**

When I was working on my Ph.D., I originally had planned to write my dissertation on Mexican writers from La Onda. Our curriculum lead us directly to Latin American "Boom" and post-boom writers. I loved their work (this is before I was reading women writers very much). I suppose I needed to address some of the issues these male writers left under erasure.

But more important, early in my academic career, I travelled to Mexico with students and on University business. The shock—*El choque famoso* [the infamous shock]—was truly overwhelming. *Tuve que escribir sobre eso y de una manera que lo entendiera la gente mexicana, y también la Raza de acá* [I had to write about that and in a way in which the Mexican people could understand it and also Chicanos on this side of the border].

13. Are you familiar with the novel *Noche de califas* (1982) by Armando Ramírez. A Chicana character named Eva appears in the novel. She freely expresses her sexuality and eventually drives the protagonist, Macho Prieto, into madness. Is Marina, the protagonist in *Paletitas de guayaba*, in opposition to the Chicana character, Eva, in *Noche de califas*?

I have not read *Noche de califas*. However, what you say about the protagonist is an interesting twist. Usually it's the women who end up mad. Mari did not intend to drive Sergio mad; she just wanted to give him pleasure. She, herself, could easily have ended up mad, but she saved herself through writing.

14. Will you maintain a dialogue with Mexican society and writers through your writing? Do you consider such a dialogue a necessity? Since Chicano literature is primarily a dialogue with the dominant Anglo-American culture, would you redirect it towards Mexico and the rest of Latin America?

Probably not. I probably said what I had to say for that reader. I would probably have to spend a significant amount of time in Mexico if I were to continue *en la misma onda* [the same theme]. I don't foresee that for the near future. I would like to see more Chicanos and Chicanas engage in that dialogue. *¿Quién sabe* [Who knows]? We may be forced to do so in the very near future with the Free "Raid" Agreement. I do think, however, that Gloria Anzaldúa (and others, of course, but she with a sense of urgency) has opened an important space for a crucial dialogue that must take place in and around the *frontera* [border] by those of use who reside on both sides.

15. Does the dialogue primarily involve females and males, that is, Chicanas, Chicanos, Mexicanos and Anglos?

There is room and need for dialogue that takes us beyond ourselves. That takes us across gender, cultural and national boundaries, race and class differences. Otherwise, how will we ever come to know and to respect each other?

16. Do male characters affect Marina's feminist consciousness? In what way?

I think male character's affect Marina's consciousness too much. But she is young; she is still somewhat male dependent and she needs males to define herself. Yet when she gets older, when she recalls/reconstructs the story of her youth, she can put it all in perspective and say any damn thing she wants without worrying about offending males. She is finally free of their hold.

17. Does the high impact of male characters on the protagonist, who is the dominant consciousness, undermine a feminist ideological project? If so, why?

The way you ask this question tells me *you believe it does*. Perhaps that is so. But perhaps it does not so much undermine an ideological project as reveal the path toward a feminist project for certain women of a certain background and of a certain generation.

18. As you are aware at the end of the 1980s Chicana writers engaged in exploring sexuality in their writing. You yourself contributed an excerpt from *Paletitas de guayaba*, "Conversaciones con Sergio" [Conversations with Sergio], to the journal *Third Woman*, volume iv. Your novel openly examines female sexuality through the protagonist Marina. Other Chicana narrative works do the same: the novels *The Mixquihuala Letters* (1986) and *Sapagonia* (1990) by Ana Castillo plus the short story "Eyes of Zapata" (1991) by Sandra Cisneros. How does this discourse on sexuality contribute to Chicana liberation? Is it in opposition to male sexuality in the novels by Alejandro Morales?

I see my own discourse on sexuality as necessary for breaking through so many layers of cultural (and I use this word very broadly here) repression. I think this tendency in the work of Chicana writers (certainly, my own) stems from the urgent need to decolonize our minds. But how can we decolonize our minds, if our bodies remain sites of colonization and domination? I cannot speak for Alejandro. Perhaps, he is striving for the same thing. Unfortunately, male discourse on sexuality so often is constructed over the passive bodies of females. If Chicana discourse on sexuality is in opposition to male discourse, it is to show that we are more than passive females whose *raison-de-êre* is to assume the missionary's wife's position for males. And to be fair to Alejandro, I think that in his more recent writing he is trying to work through the ubiquitous panopticon that represses human sexuality in general.

19. In the 1980s Chicano narrators write about the 19th century, the border

and family generations. On the other hand, Margarita Cota-Cárdenas publishes *Puppet* (1984), Lucha Corpi writes *Delia's Song* (1988) and you introduce *Paletitas de guayaba* (1991). These three novels examine the militant period of the Chicano Movement. Their *engagé* discourse recalls *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1972) by Oscar Zeta Acosta. Why do you think Chicana narrators show a marked interest in such a period while male narrators remain silent?

You may have a point there. Perhaps it is our way of appropriating the movement retrospectively, since on many levels we were denied the claim that we too had a hand in its construction. Everyone was busy pretending that *el único lugar para las manos de las chicanas era en la masa* [the only place for Chicana hands was in the tortilla dough].

20. In Chicana narrative production from the 1970s to 1992, which texts do you consider have made a fundamental contribution to its development and must be addressed in some form by future works?

Obviously Sandra has had great impact. I think Helena María Viramontes's work is critical. Ana Castillo, is tops in *Mixquiahuala Letters*. Someone who has received little attention is Margarita Cota-Cárdenas. I think her work is fascinating in a postmodern sort of way, and certainly Denise Chávez, Roberta Fernández, Lucha Corpi, Mary Helen Ponce. *Todas, sabes, todas las hermanas chicanas*.

21. One can safely say that Cota-Cárdenas and yourself are the only two Chicana novelists who write in Spanish. Do both of you form part of one specific writer's circle? Why did you choose to write in Spanish? Will you continue to write in that language or make a transition to English like Alejandro Morales? Do you think any Chicana writers in their twenties will follow Cota-Cárdenas and yourself in writing in Spanish? Do you plan to translate *Paletitas de guayaba* into English?

I think Margarita and I coincide in that our academic backgrounds are very similar. Also, we are of the same generation. This probably accounts for the similarities in our work. I will write some in Spanish, probably shorter narrative. Any writing I do in the near future will be in English, if for no other reason than to prove to myself that I can do it. I indeed hope that young writers will follow in our footsteps. *Si no, vamos a perder algo muy precioso* [If not, we are going to lose something very dear]. I don't know about translation. I have been approached more than once, but I am not ready. I am not sure that the style—orality, play, etc.—will translate well.

22. In considering your work we can see that you have a very diverse set of writings. Could you speak about your social objective in writing grammar and

narrative books as well as literary criticism?

I am first and foremost an academician. I write literary criticism, and I dabble in creative writing. I hope to change that order in the near future. By the way, I have never written a grammar book, but I have written articles on language pedagogy.

23. In June 1993, the UNAM sponsored a conference in Mexico City organized by Prof. Clair Joysmith featuring Mexicana and Chicana writers. Elena Poniatowska, Sandra Cisneros, Helena Viramontes, Ana Castillo, and several other important writers participated. In what ways will this conference contribute to the dialogue between the Southwest and Mexico, specifically between Chicanas and Mexicanas?

I am glad to hear this is happening. We have so much to learn from each other. But we must be very careful. In meeting the needs of expanded markets, we may pay a price—*el de nuestras almas, si me entiendes* [the price of our soul, if you know what I mean].

B. THE TEXT ITSELF

1. What meaning does the title *Paletitas de guayaba* have for you?

It was more than anything an image for centering my narrative which began with my childhood in Mexico. When I think of Mexico, I can actually feel the taste of street popsicles in my mouth. Perhaps it was just the treacherous unconscious at work.

2. Which Chicana/o and Mexican writers influenced your writing of *Paletitas de guayaba*? Which and whose techniques helped you develop your own?

Cota-Cárdenas, her irreverence and boldness; Denise Chávez, her love for *familia* [the family]; Ana Castillo, her delicious irony; Morales, our Chicano maverick; Elizondo, *por lo mal habla'o* [for his bawdiness]; Hinojosa; his wonderful humor—*de este lado* [from this side of the border]. *Del otro* [from the other side]—José Agustín, *y el gran papi* [the Great Daddy], Octavio Paz. *Entre mujeres* [from among the women], Rosario Castellanos, Marta Traba, *y la mera, mera* [the incomparable] Sor Juana.

3. Do Sergio and the Anglo professor who seduces the protagonist symbolize oppression at different levels, for example, student-teacher relationship, Anglo-Chicana subordination, and Mexicano-Chicana relationship? That is, do they symbolize female oppression in both societies at various levels: economic,

psychological, cultural, gender, and sexual?

What can I say. I doubt very much that I was in control of all those levels. I truly believe that language betrays us at every turn, and while I may have been wanting to say one thing, I probably said a whole lot of things I wasn't particularly bent on saying.

4. What particular historical elements of Mexican society do you examine in the novel? The Tlatelolco massacre, guerrilla war, and what else?

Colonial texts, attitudes of Mexicanos toward Chicanos, class stratification, cultural myths like La Malinche, Mexico's convenient amnesia.

5. In the novel, why did you choose to have Mari find her identity in Mexico, especially in a space named Casa Aztlán? Why did you not place her in some barrio in New Mexico or in another space of Southwest?

As I said earlier, I had been travelling to Mexico frequently just before writing *Paletitas de guayaba*. I felt enamored, frustrated, angry, befuddled, inspired, rejected of/by/at Mexico. I wanted to write about those emotions and I also wanted to document one of the most beautiful periods of my life—my childhood in Mexico. The casa Aztlán thing was something that I discovered in Mexico. I learned that there had been such a house where Chicanos studying at the UNAM lived, but I never knew anyone who had been directly involved. After I wrote *Paletitas de guayaba*, I had a student at New Mexico who had actually lived there. In *Paletitas de guayaba*, it, of course, functions as a secure harbor in a sea of alienation.

6. Some readers argue that the relationship between Sergio and Marina marks a sexist structure in *Paletitas de guayaba*. Beyond the mutual love between both of them, the female protagonist is locked into a student-teacher relationship with Sergio, where the latter apparently is the teacher. How does the feminist world view subvert such an apparent sexist structure? How is such a view constructed in the novel?

Of course it is a sexist structure. Our discourse, contestatory as it may strive to be, is trapped in the prison house of sexist language and structures. I think this relationship mirrors the experience of women who did advanced study in American universities before the heyday of feminism. How we struggled to maintain some sense of self and dignity, but had no mirrors to look into except male eyes and texts. *Y pa' cabarla de fregar* [And to make things worse] they did their damndest to make us despise the work of women. Fortunately we carried the memory of our mothers, *abuelitas, tías*, [grandmothers, aunts] etc. or we would never have survived. I wanted to represent that experience so that other women, especially young Chicanas,

would question it, and vow not to repeat it. I still see this going on in university settings—young women who won't come near Chicana professors, who prefer to be mentored by males because they continue to see us as inferior to our male colleagues. *Y no se les haga que sólo Sergio es el maestro aquí* [And one should not think that Sergio is the only teacher]. It is very possible that he too may have learned a few things from Mari. There is no doubt, however, that he is her mentor.

7. What is your concept of La Malinche? What function does she play in the configuration of the protagonist Marina? Does the latter have a Malinche function in relationship with the Anglo professor and with Sergio? With the new Chicano society present in the novel?

La Malinche is the element of subversion that you allude to above. She is as much, if not more of a teacher to Mari than Sergio or el gavacho [the white dude]. Personally she is a figure that has always fascinated me and I wanted to know her better. When she spoke to me, I was left breathless. I found her to be more complex than I had ever imagined her to be. I felt about her the way I felt about my mother, whom I cared for as she battled cancer. As she passed from being my mother to my child, dependent on me for her every need, I learned to see her as more than my mother, as a deeply complex, wise, and admirable, woman trapped in sexist constructs. Likewise, I came to see La Malinche as an complex and extraordinary woman—also trapped in a cultural gender code.

8. Does the high impact of male characters on the protagonist, who is the dominant consciousness, undermine a feminist ideological project? That is, why are the Anglo professor and Sergio Marina's teachers? What is the difference between both of them?

They are, and they aren't different. Sergio is much closer culturally to Mari. He is far more sensitive to women's issues than Steve, who is really a self-serving sanamabichi. He also understands the plight of Chicanos and understands oppression in global terms. In the end, however, he must give himself to *greater* causes. And indeed there are more important things in the world than Mari's individual desire. But then "The Woman Question" has always been secondary to the *real* issues on the agendas of enlightened males *¿qué no?*

9. At the closing of the novel Sergio seems to be a superficial or unidimensional figure. To what extent is this image necessary to construct the feminist subject? Does his configuration or role matter?

I considered developing him more. In the end, however, I decided I could accomplish what I thought was important without developing him. His role is thus a pretext, but through his presence I was able allude to other issues.

10. What is the symbolic function of the tía-abuela and the mother? Of the character Dolores Huerta?

When we (my sisters and I) were young, if we ever left home for more than a few days, we had to go to our abuelitas for *la bendición* [a blessing ritual]. As a Chicana, I cannot do *anything*, embark upon any trip, adventure or project without calling upon my foremothers for *la bendición*. They appear in *Paletitas de guayaba* to guide me, to give me their *bendición*.

While I was writing *Paletitas de guayaba*, I had the honor of meeting Dolores Huerta. I just wanted to pay homage to another one of my heroínas chicanas.

11. A writer draws much from her experience when writing fiction. To what extent is this true in your case? How much of *Paletitas de guayaba* is based on your life experience?

The childhood experiences in Mexico are autobiographical. Most of the stuff having to do with *familia* [family] is also autobiographical. Once Mari gets past puberty, she's on her own; she constructs herself word by word.

12. The short-story "Rosebud" and the novel *Paletitas de guayaba* feature two key stages in a woman's development, adolescence and young womanhood. In your writing agenda what does the first have to do with the second? Why are they in different languages?

I've spoken a little about this above. *Rosebud* is still in the writing and some of the issues present in *Paletitas de guayaba* will appear in it, though in a much more subdued fashion. The dawning of sexuality will be an important theme in *Rosebud*. *Paletitas de guayaba* is perhaps the aftermath, the story of the thwarting of sexuality, and one woman's effort to regain it.

13. In the 1980s Chicana lesbians made a noticeable contribution to Chicana and Chicano literature, for example, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. They co-edited *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) which won the literary prize Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award in 1986 and Anzaldúa published the acclaimed book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). Does the presence of Isaura in *Paletitas de guayaba* represent your dialogue with their contribution? Do you feel that heterosexual Chicanas must address the lesbian question? How pertinent is such a question to Chicana literature?

A very definite yes to all of your questions. My inclusion of Isaura was my attempt to at least acknowledge and make room for the presence of Chicana lesbians *within* our cultural borders. It is of course only a minimal gesture, and I believe that

heterosexual Chicanas must indeed enter into a serious dialogue with Chicana lesbian writers. I think their impact on our literary corpus—both Chicana and Chicano—has been tremendous.

14. Will there be a sequel to *Paletitas de guayaba*?

I've thought about that. Perhaps I will write about Mari at the stage of her life when she constructs the *Paletitas de guayaba* text. I might set it in an American University that fires all its Chicana professors for being rabble rousers. Hmmm, definitely has possibilities.

15. What is the role of the writer?

To inscribe the voices of those who might otherwise remain silent.

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